

ARTICLE APPEARED
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8 October 1984**JACK ANDERSON****Mystery Cloaks
Iran's Role in
Beirut Bombing**

In the back rooms of the Pentagon and the National Security Council, some strategists became convinced that Iranians were behind the bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut last month and discussed retaliatory military action against Iran.

One source told my associate Lucette Lagnado that the options ranged from bombing Tehran to striking the Iranian revolutionary guard units deployed in Lebanon.

Two weeks before the suicide bombing, Iran's President Ali Khamenei made a mysterious appearance in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley where the revolutionary guards are stationed.

The timing suggests that he may have had something to do with the bombing. But some intelligence analysts have raised the possibility that Khamenei tried to prevent the terrorist attack.

The evidence is persuasive that Shiite Moslem fanatics, inspired by the ravings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, drove suicide vehicles that blew up U.S. Marine headquarters in 1983 and twice shattered the U.S. Embassy. What is less certain is whether the attacks were

approved at the highest level of the Iranian government.

Some of President Reagan's political advisers saw the latest embassy bombing as an opportunity for him to demonstrate his "macho" leadership on the eve of the election. They wanted him to retaliate. Other advisers urged Reagan to forget the macho issue and focus on the peace issue. They seem to have the president's ear.

Here are the details, meanwhile, of Khamenei's sudden surprise visit to Lebanon. He showed up in Syria on Sept. 6, a Moslem holiday. For a religious fundamentalist to travel on a holy day astonished his Syrian hosts and indicated that the trip was urgent.

Khamenei was accompanied by the cabinet minister in charge of the revolutionary guards. After meeting with Syrian President Hafez Assad, the Iranian dignitaries hurried to Baalbek in northeastern Lebanon, where the Iranian volunteers are based.

Baalbek is also the headquarters for the shadowy Islamic Jihad group, which has claimed responsibility for the attacks on U.S. installations. Did Khamenei bring the ayatollah's blessing for the embassy bombing? Or did he try to dissuade the terrorist group from its intended attack? Our intelligence agencies don't know.

Before the bombing, intelligence analysts suggested a different reason for Khamenei's surprise side

trip to Baalbek. They were told that Assad had complained to Khamenei about the unruly behavior of the Iranian troops in Lebanon and that the visiting president went to Baalbek to remonstrate with the revolutionary guards.

But intelligence sources now believe it is unlikely that Khamenei could have visited Baalbek without learning that a major anti-American strike was in the works. This would mean that Khamenei either approved the bombing or was overruled by the terrorists after he left.

My sources lean to the view that radical elements in the Iranian government engineered the embassy bombing from start to finish. But they aren't certain enough yet to urge sending bombers over Tehran.

Strictly Personal: Some of my most urgent mail comes from children who read my report about the Young Astronauts program that President Reagan is developing. Some addressed their letters to Reagan; others wrote to me.

A 9-year-old wrote: "I hope you will consider me when you are trying to think of a child to go on a space flight P.S. I like jelly beans too!"

Another letter offered these credentials: "I'm 9 years old and have good grades in school and am a Girl Scout."

To all the kids who wrote me: the president will make an announcement on the Young Astronaut program in a few days.